

TRANSCRIPT

Family grocery store grows by staying close to its roots

Podcast interview with Bryan Neiman, Director of Store Operations for Neiman's Family Market; and Janelle Kozyra, member of the Kimco Realty blogging team

Janelle: Greetings everyone. Janelle Kozyra here for a podcast with Kimco Realty. Today I have with me Bryan Neiman, who is the Director of Store Operations for Neiman's Family Market, which is a Kimco tenant. Bryan, it's great to have you with us today. Thanks for joining us.

Bryan: Well thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Janelle: Can you give us an overview of Neiman's Family Market?

Bryan: Yep. We started 30 years ago in Alpena, Mich. My dad along with my grandfather and my mom, they moved us from Ann Arbor, Mich., to Alpena, Mich., and we opened our first store back in 1983.

Janelle: Tell us the story of your founding. How did the idea come to your family and how did it all come to be?

Bryan: Well, my grandfather on my mom's side, Grandpa Schmidt, was in the grocery business right after he got out of World War II. He opened his first store and was in the business for a long time. My dad was a teacher in Ann Arbor and was teaching junior high, and the grocery store opened up around the corner from where we lived.

My dad had been talking to my grandfather, his father-in-law, and he said, well, I'm going to just go to work up here at the store, see if I like it. Well, my dad started there and just loved it. Worked nights and weekends and was teaching school during the day and just really found a passion working with customers and still being able to teach the kids that were working for him there.

He had the best of both worlds and he could really do his own thing by, "as hard as I work, it all comes back to us." Just really enjoyed that. So about six, eight months later, a store opened up in Alpena, Mich., and my grandfather said, hey, there's a group that's going to go up there and purchase it if you want to be an owner and manager, and from there.

So we packed up our little Volkswagen Beetle and all kinds of stuff, and headed to Alpena, Mich. I knew it was a little bit different period to live in when the first year there we had to shovel our roof. So when we moved to northern Michigan, it was a little bit different.

But we started out in 1983, and worked really, really hard -- my dad and my mom. And my mom was just going to work part time for six, eight months to get the store going, and about 25 years later, she retired. So she retired a few years back. So that's how we got started. And my dad just loved the business and has enjoyed it ever since.

Janelle: And you have opened two other stores since your first one, and where are they located?

Bryan: Yep, we have two other stores. We have one in Tawas, Mich., and we have one in St. Clair, Mich. Tawas is just south of Alpena in Northern Michigan, and it was a community that lost the grocery store due to bankruptcy. Being a community activist like my dad is and trying to grow locally, he, and we, had an opportunity to purchase that store and it worked out really well for us.

About a year later, all of a sudden, the opportunity at St. Clair happened. My dad is originally from St. Clair. So it was a perfect fit and we moved back there and opened a store there, too. So it was great to get a chance to open two stores and really be inside the community.

Janelle: And I understand you are planning to open up a fourth location soon in Clarkston, Mich., which will be in the White Lake Commons shopping center, which is a Kimco center. How did you pick your new location?

Bryan: Well we got a letter from Kimco about the center and that it was available. We were starting to think of other opportunities, and we did look at the area that we'd go into in Clarkston. It was a community that we just looked around and said, wow, we really like the community. It's a town that is really looking for a small town grocer, which is our niche.

I mean we're family-owned, we really strive to be a part of the community, develop relationships with the community, develop that place where you go and you know everybody in there by name, and your friends and family shop there, sort of that community meeting place.

So we liked Clarkston a lot, and then started to develop a really good relationship with Kimco, and were able to see that this was going to be a nice -- really had a great working relationship with everybody at Kimco and thought, wow, this could really work well for us. So we just went and decided this would be our next spot.

Janelle: What has made your relationship with Kimco so positive?

Bryan: Everybody we've worked with has been just so helpful, and what can we do to help you? Here's what we've got and this is what we're going to do. They've just been very active in pursuing us and making sure we're getting what we need, and then turning around and helping us work with the community and making sure we get the right incentives from the local municipalities and just say, hey, what can we do to help? And we just developed a really good relationship with Scott Tucker, who's been part of the process, and some other folks, so just been great.

Janelle: When do you anticipate to open in the White Lake Commons shopping center?

Bryan: We anticipate opening in the spring of 2013, and we keep getting that stuff squared away. So we're going to completely remodel the interior of the store. There was an existing grocery store before. So everything comes out.

We're going to redo the entire décor package inside, redo the front entrance, and add a lot of Neiman's-type stuff inside. Just really make it a showcase for not only the Neiman's store, but for the White Lake

Commons shopping center to be really the retail center of choice for those in the independence community and township in the Clarkston community.

Janelle: Have you started to formulate any of your plans for your grand opening yet?

Bryan: We've started that a little bit, working with our marketing department, and we haven't really come to finalize anything. But we'll be working with the local chamber. And the local chamber has just been wonderful to work with. Penny, the Director of Clarkston Community Chamber, has been just wonderful. They've been very helpful over the last year as we began working on this site.

So we are looking forward to working with them, Kimco, and our marketing department, and again, Spartan Stores, who is our supplier, we're looking forward to working with them and developing a great grand opening plan and kick it off and have a great time with it.

Janelle: So this'll be your fourth store. Why have you decided to expand from your roots and what has enabled you to expand, as well?

Bryan: We've gone into communities that either had existing stores or needed stores, but it's really been our customer base that has allowed us to expand. We're really small, we're family-owned, and we just want to expand. We're going to expand controllably and each store will be profitable and that's a big thing for us. So as our stores continue to grow, our existing stores give us the opportunity to grow outside.

And Michigan is starting to come back. The auto industry is starting to come back a little bit and we just find these different areas that really would like a hometown grocer that can be part of the community. So that's enabled us to grow.

And as a family, we want to grow our business, not just for ourselves, but for our employees. Every time we add a new store, somebody that works for us has an opportunity to advance themselves, whether they move to the new store, or a new position opens up in their existing store. We'll hire about 110 to 120 people for this store, but we'll also need to hire support staff in our corporate office.

So we've been able to hire some of those folks and provide new opportunities for those who currently work for us. So that's always fun to see people who've been with us grow and do new things. We've got a lot of employees in Alpena that have been with us since day one, 30 years ago, and so to see them grow and get new opportunities is always a good thing.

Janelle: Are there any other specific ways that you participate in your local community?

Bryan: I think what people will find with Neiman's is, we do the obvious. We like to become part of the chamber. We like to be part of the different service groups, whether it be Rotary, or Lions, or Kiwanis, all of those roads locally.

But helping with the schools, and one of the fun things we've done every year for the last probably 15 years is the high school homecoming games. We always like to do a free community tailgate. Or over the

last 10 years I think we've given away well over 10,000 free hot dogs at the local high school games. It's another opportunity for the community to get together and we can thank the community for their support of us.

It's all this fun stuff that we do in the community, whether it be sponsoring the hospitals in all three of our existing communities. We do a taste fest at the local hospital in St. Clair, sponsoring different events. So we just try to do a lot of little things and few big things every year in the community.

That everyday involvement I think is important, not just because it's good business, because again, like I said, our employees live and work in the communities that we're at and if we can give back and do it the right way, everybody benefits.

Janelle: One of the major initiatives that a lot of retailers are undertaking now is using social media to bolster their marketing efforts. So what is Neiman's Family Market doing as far as social media goes?

Bryan: Well, we have Facebook and we have Twitter. We go at that and just recently have grown that when we hired a marketing coordinator about a year ago. She's fresh out of college and 24, 25, and my dad and I are obviously a little bit older than that. We don't know all that stuff. So it's been great to have her on board and really develop a plan to get people to sign up.

We also have on our website an opportunity for customers to click on Make a Shopping List, and print it out. Then when they're in the store, we have a kiosk or a "cooking corner" that has a touch screen in the store, and you can print up thousands of different recipes. Or if you want to look something up, if you want to know how to cook an artichoke or what an artichoke is, it'll tell you right there in the store and print out a recipe and do a wine pairing if you want to have wine with it.

So we've really worked hard to develop that social media, because that's where it's going. Our ads are online. You can print them off. You can make your shopping list, like I said. So we've worked really hard to do that and communicate to our customers and hopefully as we continue to grow, we'll be able to add new and neat services and opportunities, because I think probably as a retailer, we're just scratching the surface of what those types of media outlets can do for us.

Janelle: Great. Well thank you Bryan. I appreciate you coming on and telling us about Neiman's Family Market.

Bryan: Thank you so much for having me today and we look forward to opening up in the center and being a part of the community and part of the Kimco community. It's just been a great relationship and we are really looking forward to getting opening and having another successful store.

Janelle: Great. Well thank you and best of luck.

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